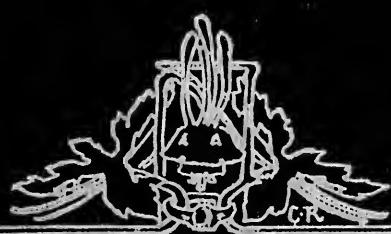


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The Quest of the Ring



Paul S. Brallier



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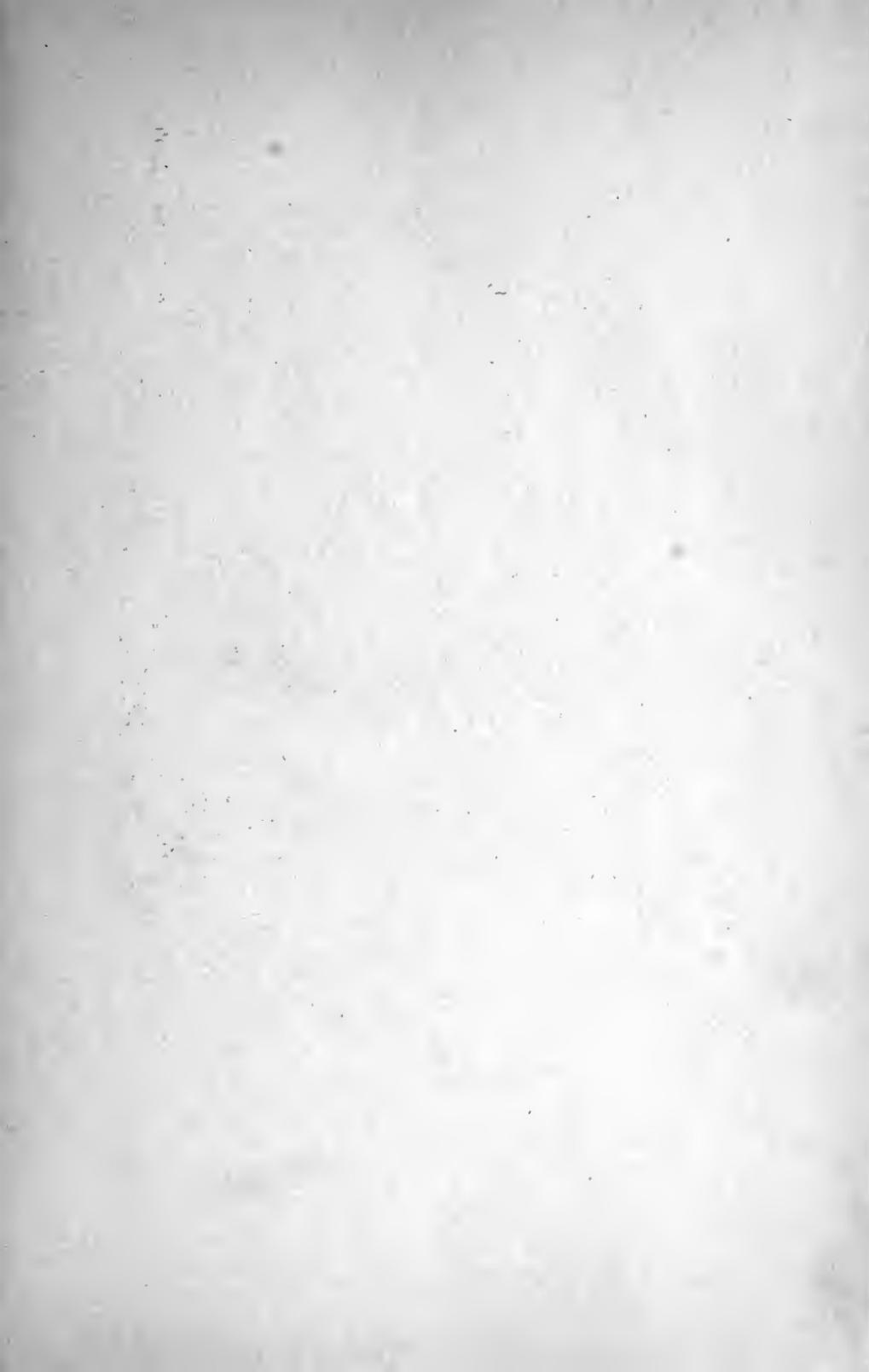
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The Quest of the Ring

D.S. Brallier



1915

BOSTON

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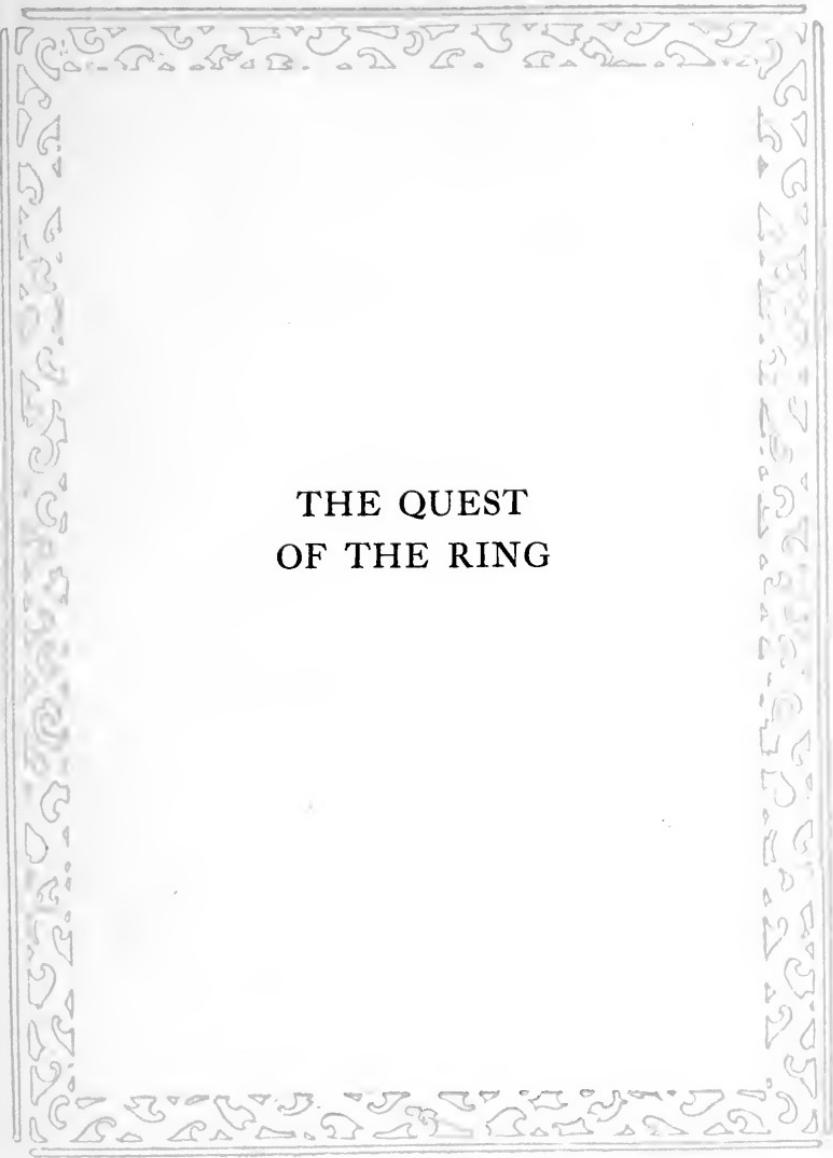
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**THE QUEST
OF THE RING**

The Quest of the Ring

TN the days before the fairies forsook the haunts of men, there lived in a far country a simple peasant Timon and his wife Asdis. For many years they were childless and this was a great sorrow to both; but finally in answer to their many prayers, there was born unto them a son whose name was called Philmon. Tenderly they watched over him and nurtured him; Asdis crooned the sweetest and softest lullabies for his baby ears and Timon often stood and looked down at him, all the love of his simple father heart shining through his eyes, half afraid even to touch this frail, delicate little creature that had been given unto his keeping.

All too swiftly, it seemed, the years of Philmon's life widened from babyhood into boyhood. He was a goodly child and fair to look upon, and in all the countryside around there was no boy like unto him in fairness or in strength. In the summer

months he went into the fields with his father and learned the secrets of growing things; learned the times of planting and of reaping, learned the signs of fair weather and of storms; watched how the bees stored away their honey. And in the long winter evenings he would sit before the fire, and his mother, as she spun, would tell him all the legends and stories of the little earth people, for Asdis was wise in all the lore of sprites and of fairies.

As Philmon grew, the years of Timon became many. The hair at his temples whitened, his steps were slower, his eyes were duller, his face more wrinkled than in the days of the boy's childhood. Thus it was that when he was grown, Philmon tilled the fields alone just as his father had tilled them before him, hearkening in all things unto his father's counsel and advice. Timon, also, told him of the things that had been, told him of the beginning of all things, and of the great men who had been

The Curse of the Ring.

before him; taught him the signs of the stars, the old folk songs and legends and all the many things he had learned in the years of his life; and to all this Philmon listened diligently, so that none was wiser than he in the knowledge that came from living.

Now it so happened that one summer's day, as Philmon was working in his father's fields, he became wearied, and laid him down in the shade of a great oak tree to rest. The fragrance of green, growing things came to him, the lazy hum of tiny winged creatures sounded in his ears, patches of a too brilliant sky made him half close his eyes, and the unbroken peacefulness of all things about him brought over him such a drowsiness that in a short while he fell into a deep sleep. Shadows flitted before his eyes, shapes of things that he could not distinguish; all that he could understand was that they were happy with a happiness that he had never known. Then there came strains of music, faint at first,

but growing more and more distinct, rising and falling in a melody so sweet that all the cares and the longings of his heart seemed to flee away; and in the midst of the music there were words,—words so wonderful that while he understood them not, yet he felt that he should understand; words that he had known once long since, but had strangely forgotten. The music stopped; there was a hush, a deep silence, and in the mist there appeared a Ring of the purest gold, burnished until it shone like the sun, so that it was impossible to look upon it steadily. For a moment it hung there, and then just as suddenly as it had come, so it vanished; and a voice,—soft, low, alluringly sweet,—called:

“Philmon, Philmon, seek thou the Ring!”

He awoke. So clear and so vivid was the impression that for a time he could scarcely persuade himself that it was not a reality. The music still sounded in his

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ears, the Ring still gleamed before his eyes, and that voice, so soft, so alluringly sweet, continued to say:

“Philmon, Philmon, seek thou the Ring!”

Thoughtfully he worked, wondering whether there were a Ring and if there were, where it should be sought; and gradually it became the supreme desire of his heart, the thing he wanted before all others. It seemed that to possess it would be the fulfillment of all his hopes and strivings, of all the impulses and the longings that were good and right.

Lower and lower sank the sun, and soon Philmon turned his face homeward. He told the story of all he had seen and heard to Asdis and said:

“O mother Asdis, is there a Ring like unto this one? Or was my dream only a dream?”

Asdis kissed him.

“Yes, my son, there is a Ring. Come

with me and I will tell thee the story of it, even as the fairies have told it to me."

She led the way to a rude bench just outside the doorway, whence they might see the sunset. Philmon seated himself at her feet. For a time she sat silent, looking over into the west. The golden rim of the sun was just touching the tips of the blue, far-distant mountains, and was gradually gathering unto itself the golden splendor that marks its departing; and far up in the heavens great masses of cloud began to gleam in the growing glory. Then she began:

"THE STORY OF THE RING

"Once, a long, long time ago, there lived in the east country a great king who was wiser than any man had been before him. And this king studied diligently the things of magic and the books which had to do with the elf people, seeking how he might control elves and fairies that they should

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do his bidding. He caused to be brought unto him all the priests and all the wise men of his vast country that they might teach him their rites and their wisdom.

"Now this king, whose name was Rhajmah, was a mighty king. Thousands of soldiers awaited his command and his war chariots were the dread of all his enemies. His lands were broad and fertile, his treasures were full to overflowing, and the palace he reared unto himself was such that no man hath seen the like of it for beauty or for splendor. Around him were all the luxuries the mind could desire; innumerable slaves fulfilled his slightest wish, his raiment was made of the softest and finest of silk and of flaxcloth; and yet with all his might, with all his wealth, with all his splendor and his luxury, King Rhajmah was unhappy.

"In vain did he try to overcome that spirit of discontent. Magnificent feasts and festivals were decreed, and he sought

to forget his unhappiness in wine and in dancing; great conquests were planned and he hoped that in the heat of battle or in the flush of victory there might come some moment of happiness. Yet the feasting and the dancing, the fighting and the overcoming, profited him nothing; and at last, in a frenzy of melancholy and disappointment, he cried:

“I am cursed, cursed of the gods, and I would that I were dead!”

“About this time there came to the palace rumors of an old witchwife whose incantations were so mighty that she controlled for a short space even the spirits of those who were dead. Eagerly the king inquired after her, and sent slaves unto her, bearing rich gifts of gold and silver and entreating her to come to his palace Nihrda. For a long time she refused, saying:

“Who am I that I should enter kings' houses?”

A Quest of the King

"But finally she was persuaded and was conducted in state to the dwelling place of Rhajmah.

"The king awaited her impatiently. When she was come and had worshipped him, he bade her arise and said unto her:

"Woman, there have come rumors to my ears saying that thou art wise in all manner of incantations. Tell me, I pray thee, how I may gain control over elves and gnomes, and I will reward thee richly."

"And the witchwife replied:

"O King, who am I that thou shouldst honor me? Knowest thou not that the elf folk are stubborn people, that they rebel against control? Behold, I know the desire of thy heart. Thou wishest happiness without mar or blemish, and thou seekest it through the earth people, who only are happy. But, O King, thinkest thou alone to be happy among mortal men? Seest thou not thy people, how they toil and labor that thou mayest have thy luxury and

thy splendor? Hearest thou not their groanings under a burden that is too great? Yea, I will tell thee what thou hast asked; I will give thee a spell so mighty that even the elf folk must bend before it; but do thou, O King, beware! I have looked into the future and I know what it is permitted no mortal to know. As the thoughts of thy heart are good, so shall thy happiness bless thee; but as they are evil, so shall it curse thee!"

"She moved towards him until her face, brown and wrinkled, was close unto his.

"Here, O King, is thy spell. At midnight in thy chamber kindle a small fire, and when it is bright, cast into it this stone which I give thee. And lo, the stone will burn, first red, then blue, then green. And when the stone burns red, thou shalt call, "Cirjanus!" and when the stone burns blue, thou shalt call, "Cirjanus!" and when the stone burns green, thou shalt say, "Cirjanus, in the name of the Burning Stone, I

The Quest of the Ring

summon thee!" and forthwith the elf Cirjanus will stand before thee, who will do thy bidding!"

"When she had done speaking, she vanished, no man knew whither, and was never seen more.

"The king did all the things even as the witchwife had told him. He cast the stone into the fire and it burned red, and he called, 'Cirjanus!'; it burned blue and he called, 'Cirjanus!'; and it burned green, whereat he cried in an exceeding loud voice, 'Cirjanus, in the name of the Burning Stone, I summon thee!' And when he had finished, behold there stood before him an elf scarcely greater than his thumb, who bowed before him and said:

"'Master, I have heard thy summons and am come. Tell me whatsoever thou desirest, and it shall be even as thou sayest!'

"And the king answered and said:

"'O Cirjanus, wise men say that only the fairies and the elves and the gnomes are

happy on the earth. I, too, fain would be happy, but of myself cannot; and now I command thee by the power I hold over thee that thou fashion me a Ring so wondrous, so beautiful, that to possess it is to be altogether happy!"

"Then Cirjanus:

"'Sire, the task thou hast given me is hard, and many days must pass ere it can be fulfilled. But behold on the third and twentieth day following this one, at midnight, I will bring unto thee that which thou wouldest have!'

"Slowly the days passed for the king, and the hours were long from sunrise to sunset and from sunset to sunrise. But the elf Cirjanus went to the sprites of sunlight and moonlight, and said:

"'Give me, I pray thee, of thy stores of gold and silver.' And they gave unto him.

"He went unto the fairies which have watch over children and said:

"'Give me, I pray thee, some of the sub-

stance of smiles and of children's laughter.' And it was given him even as he had asked.

"He went unto the flower folk and said,

"'Give me, O flower people, of thy sweetness and thy beauty,' and they gave.

"And last of all he went to the gnomes that dig in the earth, and commanded them, saying,

"'Dig me, O gnomes, the purest and finest of earth gold. Burn it with fire, cast out all dross and all blemish, until it is yellow as sunlight in the morning!' And it was done even as he had said.

"Then out of the gold of sunlight, the silver of moonlight, the substance of smiles and the laughter of children, out of the sweetness and beauty of flowers, and the purest of earth gold, Cirjanus by the magic of his power fashioned a Ring which was called the Ring of Happiness; and on the third and twentieth day gave he it unto King Rhajmah even as he had said. And

behold, when the king had placed the Ring on his finger, all care and worry and all manner of trouble left him, and he laughed as only children who are pure and innocent laugh. A great joy was upon him, and he sang songs and proclaimed feasts because his heart was happy, and Nihrda reechoed with the shouts of men drunken with wine.

"In the midst of his feasting there suddenly appeared in his great hall three gray-clad old men. No man knew how they came nor whence, for approaches to the palace were guarded; but as they entered, a sudden silence fell upon all that were in that house. And the beggars lifted up their voices and cried unto the king, and the one said:

"'O King, we hunger. Give us to eat!'

"And the other:

"'O King, we thirst, give us to drink!'

"And the other:

"'O King, the night is dark and stormy;
give us shelter!'

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"Forthwith the king was wroth and commanded his guardsmen, saying:

"'Cast them out who dare intrude upon my pleasure! What care I, ye gray beggars, whether ye hunger or thirst or perish in the storm?'

"But when the guards would lay hands upon them, they could not, for such was the virtue of the old men that none could do them violence against their will. And all the people that were there marvelled at this, and said:

"'Surely these men are gods!'

"Then spake the old men once more. Said the first:

"'O King who alone art happy among men, my curse be upon thee! May thine enemies confound thee and overcome thee!'

"And the second:

"'O King who art happier than all mortal men, my curse be upon thee! May thy people rise up against thee and destroy thee!'

"And the third:

"'O King who possessest the Ring of Happiness, my curse be upon thee! In thy death hour may thy Ring depart from thee and leave thee to die in anguish and pain as do other men!'

"And when they had done speaking, they vanished. Now a great fear smote the hearts of all who heard these words and their limbs trembled because they were afraid. But the king laughed and cried:

"'Come, let us eat and drink! They were but three beggar men who cursed me, and they are gone!'

"Forthwith the feasting and the shouting started anew.

"Now the rumor of these revelries and festivals at the palace of the king went abroad through all the country and came unto the ears of the people, and they murmured, saying:

"'Behold, the king doth feast in glory and splendor in his palace Nihrda, and we

must toil in the fields from sunrise until sunset that we may pay the taxes he layeth upon us. Rhajmah is not a good king nor a just, else he would see our labor and give us rest.'

"And the servants of the king brought him tidings that his people murmured against him and cried for a new king. But Rhajmah, being happy, gave no heed.

"The rumor came to the enemies of the king who were beyond his borders, and they took counsel one with the other and exhorted one another, saying:

"'Come, let us go up against Rhajmah and take his cities and govern his people!'"

Asdis paused for a time and looked long and steadily westward. Over the blue-black rim of the mountains there still hovered a faint reddish glow; a few stars twinkled bravely in the upper heavens, and on the face of the earth was the cool, blue mist of the evening. Then she continued:

"The enemies of the king gathered unto themselves great armies, and came across the borders of Rhajmah's land. Messengers came unto the king also and said:

"'O lord, who art mighty and great, lo, thine enemies from across thy borders do come up against thee, and the numbers of their armies are like unto the stars!'

"But the king was happy, and made merry and heeded not the sayings that came to him from afar. When the armies that were hostile came into Rhajmah's land, the people that were in that country spake unto one another and said:

"King Rhajmah is an unjust king who requireth from us all that we have. When we hunger, he feasteth; when we shiver in the frosts of the night time, he maketh merry with wine and dancing; and when our enemies come against us to devastate our fields and destroy our labors and carry us off into captivity, lo, he but laugheth, and doth not protect us! Let us rise up

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against him and make us a new king to rule over us and defend us!"

"And messengers came unto the king, saying:

"'O King, who art mighty and great and wise before all other men, thine enemies draw nearer; they lay waste thy land and burn the fruits of the soil with fire. Moreover thy people doth rise up against thee, to overthrow thee, and crieth for a new king!'

"Now while all this was done, the fairies who are the guardians of men took counsel. And they said one to another:

"'Behold this King Rhajmah, how he feasteth, how he drinketh! His people do groan under their burdens; they fall, they die, and the land is filled with the sound of their complaining. King Rhajmah is not worthy to have the Ring. Let us take it away from him and keep it in our care, and grant it unto those who by their goodness are worthy to possess it!'

"So the fairies came by night and took from off the finger of Rhajmah the Ring which was the Ring of Happiness. And joy and laughter departed from the heart of the king, and terrible dreams visited him.

"Now when the morning was come and Rhajmah had awakened, a great burden seemed to be upon him, and cares came unto him. He looked at his hand and the Ring was not there. Forthwith a great terror seized him. And at the same time a runner came unto him and said :

"'O King, thine enemies are upon thee ; thy captains flee before them as chaff before a strong wind ; and they are close unto thy palace. Thy people also rise up against thee and curse thee, so that the land is filled with strife and contention !'

"Even as he spoke, there were shouts and cries, and the enemies of the king laid siege on Nihrda, his palace. And a fear greater than the fear of death smote the heart of

Rhajmah, and he rushed to the top of a wall that he might see some way of escape. As he stood there, an arrow dipped in poison pierced his breast and he cried out in a loud voice:

“‘O thou three gray beggar men, have pity, have mercy upon me!’

“And he died in pain and in agony. His enemies burned his city, burned his palace, so that no trace of it was left upon the face of the earth save a vast mound of flame blackened stones.

“The fairies have kept the Ring, Philmon, my son. Unto every man they show it; unto every man comes the call that has come to thee; and every man seeketh after it. Some seek in one way, some in another, but all men seek. Yet it is only unto him who is worthy, unto him who searcheth diligently, unfalteringly, that it is granted to have the Ring. And the song thou heardest is the Ring Song, which no man understandeth until he seeth the Ring.”

She kissed him tenderly and whispered :

"Go, my son. As thy heart bids thee and as the fairies bid thee, seek thou the Ring. And if thou seekest with all thy heart and with all thy strength, then two fairies will go with thee to keep thee and shield thee from harm, and the names of those fairies are Faith and Hope."

Once more she kissed him, and then left him to muse and to ponder in the shadows of the stars.

Now there lived in this same country a maiden passing beautiful. Tender were her eyes and blue, blue as the sea is at even ; white was her skin and faintly flushed with rich, warm heart blood ; red were her lips and sweet ; and her hair was a glory, a halo. And this maiden was kind and good so that all the country folk loved her even as their own daughters. Philmon likewise loved her, with all the earnestness and all

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the strength of his pure and simple heart, and he came unto her and told her the things that he had learned. When he had finished he said :

“And I go, Rama, to search for the Ring. Whither my journey taketh me I know not and the day of my returning I cannot tell. Must I go alone? The vision cometh to all people; haply thou hast seen it and would seek even as I shall seek. Without thee, the way will be rough and weary, but with thee—O Rama, Rama, heart of my heart, soul of my soul, wilt thou seek the Ring with me?”

For just a moment did she pause, and then the downcast eyes were raised and looked fearlessly, lovingly, full into his. Softly her voice broke the silence:

“Yes, Philmon, I will go and search for the Ring with thee!”

He pressed her to his heart and kissed her.

“Rama,” he whispered tenderly, “me-

thinks I hear the Ring Song even now."

Thus it was that Philmon and Rama set out in search of the Ring which is the Ring of Happiness, and Timon and Asdis blessed them.

First they turned toward the cities of men. "For," reasoned they, "if all men have seen this vision, perchance we may learn from them where we should seek." On their way they met a merchant returning from a far country with his wares laden on beasts of burden. And Philmon addressed him, saying:

"Good sire, we seek the Ring of Happiness. Canst thou tell us where it may be found?"

And the merchant, laughing loudly, said:

"Yes, my good people, I can tell thee. The Ring, which I have seen with mine own eyes, cometh with the abundance of riches. Unto him who hath the most, the Ring is added. Wherefore do I ply my



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trade diligently, that I may gain wealth.
Go thou and do likewise."

Philmon thanked him and he and Rama hastened on, a little saddened. Was the Ring, then, to be gained so readily? Was this wonder of beauty merely the reward of gaining wealth? Thus they reasoned one with the other. As they hurried onward he drew her closer. Was it just his fancy, or, when he looked into her eyes, so brave, so blue, was there not a shimmer of brightness somewhere, faint strains of a too sweet music—?

After a season they came into a great city, one of the greatest of the cities of men. And there they saw beggars, and people so poor that they had scarce enough to eat; saw evil men whose eyes were cunning and cruel. All was hurry and tumult and confusion; men moved hither and thither, this way and that; caravans sometimes blocked the streets, and above the general hubbub rose the voices of merchants crying their

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wares. Past the beggars and the poor, past the men with evil eyes, through the shifting throngs, they hastened until they came to the square of the market place. There they paused a moment in the shelter of an overhanging roof, and looked about them.

"Can it be," mused Philmon, "that the Ring is the reward of such labor as this? Is the happiness of one founded on the misery and the suffering of another? All men cannot have riches and honor, yet all men see and seek the Ring! Nay, there must be some mistake; the fairies could not have meant this!"

As they stood there, reasoning thus with one another, it chanced that an old scholar passed that way. So venerable was his face, so wise seemed his eyes, that Philmon detained him and said:

"Master, we seek the Ring of Happiness. Hast thou heard of it, or knowest thou aught of where it may be found?"

The old man looked at them a moment and then said scornfully:

"Many there be who search for this Ring, but all save a very few, such as I, go astray. Wisdom and learning one must have before he is accounted worthy of possessing it!"

"And where, good master, may this wisdom whereof thou speakest be found?" asked Rama.

"In books, child, and in the teachings of great philosophers. Look you over this market place; see how men toil and sweat that they may have riches. They think they strive after happiness when they try to be rich, but to the wise man all this is as nothing. He knoweth that wealth is but an empty thing, and seeketh after that which is lasting,—wisdom."

So saying, he left them. But hardly had he passed when they noticed a small crowd gathered about a teacher in one corner of the square. Going thither, they listened to

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the words he spoke, which were after this fashion:

"Wherefore do ye struggle, O ye men? Know ye not that the work of your hands will crumble, perchance even before your own eyes? Wherefore do ye toil to gather unto yourselves great wealth, or honor, or fame? Ye say, 'We would be happy!' and ye say well, for that is the end of all being. But think ye that so pure and godlike a thing as happiness can be made of such dross as gold or idle fame? Behold, when ye possess them, they crumble in your hands even as dust and become of little value in your sight. Wherefore do ye delve in books and the teachings of other men, wherefore do ye seek after wisdom? Can ye by thinking make yourselves joyful, or by reasoning make yourselves glad? Happiness is a divine thing, and ye cannot know it since ye are mortal; happiness is a perfect thing, and ye cannot understand it because ye are imperfect. Therefore are

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your lives consumed in vanity, for ye continually do strive after that which ye can never attain."

The words of the speaker troubled Philmon, so that he whispered to Rama:

"Come, let us go onward, for the words which this man speaketh are true and yet not true, and I like them not."

On the following day they found a man all unkempt and unclean, lying drunken by the wayside; and they ministered unto him. When he could talk they questioned him also, even as they had inquired of others, and he answered:

"The Ring of Happiness? Ha! Ha! Why here it is. There is one at the bottom of every wine cask!" And he raised a big finger whereon was a ring of brass, all blackened and tarnished.

"Nay, nay, my friend, you are mistaken. This is not the Ring nor even like it!"

"Not like it! See it gleam and glow!

Wine is happiness and a Ring lies at the bottom of every cask!"

For many, many years they lived in this city, searching its highways and its byways, seeing its miseries and sorrows, and still finding no trace of the Ring, when one day it so happened that they chanced upon a dying man in one of the filthy little by-streets that they found so common in certain quarters. And the man writhed in his agony, and begged for water, so that Rama pillow'd his head in her lap, while Philmon brought water from a fountain hard by. When his pain was abated, the dying man looked at the two and such was his insight that he read a story in the little evidences of discouragement he saw in their faces, and said gently:

"Are ye searching after the Ring of Happiness, ye twain?"

Wondering that he should have guessed so well, they told him they were.

"Then be ye not discouraged. Go ye

into the fields, the forests. Listen to the songs that the birds sing and brooks murmur; listen to the stories that the stones tell; inquire even of the stars and learn their secrets, and perchance thou wilt find some trace of that for which thou seekest."

His breath began to come in gasps, but still he went on:

"All—my life—have I sought—here; but I—could not find—it.—Profit ye—by my example."

A moment he struggled, and then the muscles relaxed and stiffened. Men bore him away and buried him, and they two went on. And when they wearied of searching in the cities of men, Philmon said unto Rama:

"Let us do even as the dying man hath taught us; let us seek the Ring in the fields and forests, and among the wild, growing things. Here all is turmoil and unrest; each seeketh after the desires of his own heart and doeth as his self biddeth him.

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Perchance where the air is untainted and the sunshine pure, the Ring may be hid."

So they departed from the city and came first unto the farm lands, and then to the great forests that cover the earth like a garment. For a long time they searched thus, nor were they alone in their seeking. On all sides of them were men and women who sought the Ring for which they sought, and ever and anon came the cry, "I have found it!" But each time, when they hastened to the spot, the ring they saw was a false one, and they departed again, saddened. With the fleeting years their youth and their vigor passed, and the hopes that once they had, began to waver. Yet they searched with shining eyes, and in spite of fears and disappointments there crept into their faces such a look of peace and of trust that men looked on them wondering what manner of people these were.

And in their wanderings they came upon a hermit who lived in the midst of a thick

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and gloomy forest whither men rarely ventured to go because of its darkness. The hermit was an old man whose back was bent with the burden of years, and Philmon had to speak in a loud voice that he might hear. And Philmon inquired of him, saying:

"My father, we are seeking for the Ring of Happiness, and have sought these many years. Knowest thou aught of it?"

When he heard, the old man laughed:

"And ye seek the Ring?" he cried in his high, cracked voice. "So do most men. Fools, they wander up and down the face of the earth, and since they fear lest their neighbors may find the Ring, they lie, they hate, they cower, they fear, and their hearts are filled with much evil. Can happiness be the fruit of such striving? Come ye away from among them who cause this wrong; live with thyself and learn thou the secrets of things. The Ring thou seekest is but a myth, an old wives' tale. Thou

canst never be happy save in part. I, too, once sought even as thou hast sought; but I was wise, and got me away from the company of men and came hither unto this forest, in whose shadows I have learned many things."

Rama's head sank, and the eyes, so tender, so blue, so brave, filled with tears.

"Philmon, Philmon," she sobbed, "have we sought all these years and in vain? Have all our hopes and our fears been for naught?"

"Nay, nay," Philmon answered as he drew her to him, "thou art but weary, my heart."

And turning to the old man he cried:

"Thou liest; the gloom and the darkness of the forest have crept into thy veins till thy heart is as dark as its shadows. There is a Ring, for I have seen it in a dream, and my heart telleth me that the dream is true."

So saying, they turned away and left the hermit to his darkness.

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One day at even, as they were walking through the fields, fields bright and beautiful with flowers, Rama suddenly stopped.

"Listen," she whispered; "I hear some one calling."

Philmon listened intently, but heard nothing.

"Come, Rama," he said, "it was but the wind thou heardst."

"Nay," she answered, "I hear it even now, a voice that calls me, calls, 'Rama! Rama!'"

Still Philmon heard nothing.

"I must go, Philmon," she continued, "for still the voice calls. Tarry here and I will come back to thee."

So Philmon sat him down on a great stone to rest and to wait, and as he sat there, behold, a deep sleep came upon him, and strange visions of sorrow and pain flitted before his sleeping eyes. When he awoke, the morning sun shone brightly out of a glorious sky. Everything was as it

had been the evening before and yet there was something—Where was Rama?

Quickly he arose and looked about for her, thinking that she might be gathering of the flowers near by. Far as he could see, there was no living creature. He called to her many times, but there came no answer save the faint stir of the morning wind in the fields. He hurried in the way she had gone, hoping to find her; but still he saw her not nor heard any reply to his calls. A fear came over him and smote his heart, a vague, indefinable sense of something lost; vainly did he struggle with it to suppress it; always it would come again. How well he remembered her words, the last she had spoken to him:

“I must go, Philmon, for still a voice calls.”

The “voice,” the “voice”; yes, that was it. Yet what voice? Could it have been—? No! No!

“Rama!” he shouted, “Rama!” in an

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agony of suspense, refusing to believe his thought, yet fearing that it was true. And in answer came only an empty silence.

Heartsick, sorrowing, and alone, he turned and retraced his steps. Great, blinding tears filled his eyes, and he stumbled aimlessly onward, giving little heed to the path that he took, and had it not been for his guardian fairies, Faith and Hope, he had surely gone astray and had been lost. But they were brave fairies and strong, and when he stumbled, or sank down in his pain, they bore him up in their arms and comforted him.

After many days had passed and the wound in his heart was soothed somewhat, Philmon lifted up his eyes and looked about him, and behold he was in a strange country, the Land of the Sunset, a land of deep, thickly wooded ravines, where soft vagrant breezes faintly rustled the multi-colored leaves, a land of gloriously tinted skies, a land strangely beautiful, strange in

that there was an indescribable sense of sadness in its beauty and its splendor. And all about him he saw other folk moving onward, ever onward, toward the golden heart of glory in the western sky. Some there were who hastened, as though they would finish something and the time were getting short; and others there were who loitered as though loath to leave this land of brightness and color. But ever and anon there came a chill, cold blast, and the leaves rattled, and these loiterers shivered in its breath. The people, he saw, too, were for the most part old folk whose hair was white and long, whose faces were wrinkled, and whose eyes were sunken and dim. He looked on himself, and lo, his hair was also gray; and once, when he stooped to drink at a placid pool, he saw that his face was wrinkled even as his father Timon's had been. Sometimes he saw a young face in the folk around him, yet it was not a fresh young face, nor good to

look upon, but was pale and sickly and showed lines no young face should show.

Now all these people were searching, eagerly, anxiously, often despairingly, some in dark, dank places, others in bright airy spots, peering earthward with their dim eyes as though they would find something which they held dear. Philmon marvelled at this and when one old man came close to him, he addressed him, saying:

“My brother, what seekest thou?”

The man stared at him curiously for an instant and then went on searching.

“I seek what all men seek,” quoth he; “the Ring of Happiness.”

Philmon started. What had he been doing, whither was he bound? Was he not seeking this Ring, and yet had he not forgotten it? Perhaps in his trance he had passed the place where it lay hid; perchance his neglect had ruined a whole life's endeavor; and yet—

The old man had gone on, but even now he was not far distant, and Philmon hastened to him and cried:

"My brother, I, too, seek this Ring. I am lonely and sick of heart and would fain search with thee."

The old man looked at him a moment, and then tears glistened in his eyes and he said simply:

"Come, for I too am lonely!"

And they twain sought with all diligence hither and thither in the Land of the Sunset; and lo, as they journeyed, the glory of the sky grew dim, the leaves fell in eddying showers about them, and the cold winds blew oftener and longer than before. They hastened as well as they could, yet it seemed that they moved always more slowly.

Gradually the shadows deepened and they found themselves at length in the Land of the Twilight, a gray, bleak, desolate land wherein was no sound save the

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noise of the wind and the tread of uncertain feet. Gray was the road at their feet, and gray were the huge boulders, piled in great fantastic heaps, through which it ran; gray and dead were the trees in this country, and gray was the sky overhead. Chill, cold winds swept across it, bending the stiff branches of the trees and moaning and wailing through nooks and crannies in the rocks.

All about them were throngs of people, older and grayer, paler than they had been before, all hastening onward, onward, onward. Some peered into the grayness, still hoping to find this Ring; others who had despaired, laughed loudly, and said that there was no Ring. Yet all moved onward, onward, onward, through the Land of the Twilight.

And it came to pass as they were traveling through this country, Philmon's companion stumbled and fell, and when he would rise he could not, for the bone in his

leg had snapped in twain. Philmon urged him, saying:

"Come, arise, for the shadows are fast settling, and if thou stayest here Hunger and Starvation will seize upon thee and carry thee by a shorter path to the land whither thou goest!"

And he answered:

"Nay, my friend, I cannot, for the strength of my bones hath forsaken me. Do thou go on alone, and haply even yet thou mayst find the Ring ere the shadows of the Land of Night fall upon thee!"

But Philmon would not.

"I cannot leave thee here to perish, my brother, while I seek after Happiness!"

"Go, I pray thee," said the other. "See thou not how the darkness creepeth upon thee; feelest not how cold the wind bloweth upon thy cheek? Hasten, for my sake, hasten!"

Philmon arose and set his face away from his companion and departed a few

paces. Yet his heart smote within him; he stopped, and then ran back to his friend.

"I cannot leave thee," he cried, "I cannot. Where thou livest there will I also live, and where thou diest there will I also die. Thou needst not perish here, for lo, I am strong and can bear thee up in my arms!"

The old man suffered him to lift him and carry him, and thus they proceeded. Darker and darker grew the shadows, colder and colder blew the wind. Tiny flakes of snow came driving down and smote on their faces like sword points. Philmon grew weaker and weaker, the storm came faster and faster. He staggered, he stumbled, his breath came in short gasps, the burden in his arms grew heavier and heavier, till he thought he scarce could bear it longer. A strong gust of wind brought him to his knees, he struggled to rise, and sank back, swayed a moment, half turned, and fell to the ground.

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He heard the wind scream, saw dimly, indistinctly, a maze of swiftly flying snow-flakes;—then came silence and blackness.

The air was warm, laden with the perfume of sweet, hidden wild flowers; the leaves of trees rustled faintly, whispering great, great secrets to a stealthy night wind. Down, deep down in the ravine, the shadows were piled in great indefinable masses; strange and silent they lurked behind tree trunks and in tangles of brush, fearing the white pursuing moonbeams which glanced from tree tops and wove themselves into a faint, silvery mist hovering lightly over all. Silently, majestically, the great round moon queen sailed above the opposite ridge, surrounded by all her sparkling, twinkling courtiers.

Philmon awoke, and lay calmly looking at the scene before him. He took deep, full breaths of the air because he found pleasure in it; he arose, and his body was

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no longer a burden, but a light thing that found every movement pleasant. And as he stood there, faint, sweet music came to his ears, music that wakened longings and faint desires. Some one stood by his side; he turned and looked into the eyes of his friend. Even as he looked, the old man changed; his raiment, white as snow, gleamed; and his eyes, tender, sweet, grew bluer, deeper, until the goodness, the sweetness, the tenderness of a universe seemed swallowed in their depths.

"Philmon," he said,—and Philmon's heart trembled for joy at the sound of his voice,—"thou hast sought earnestly, thou hast sought well; wherefore the fairies have given it unto thee to find the Ring."

Philmon looked down, and behold, at his feet there lay a Ring, wondrously beautiful and fair to look upon. He stooped, picked it up, and slipped it on his finger; and when he would have spoken to his

friend, he had departed and in his place stood Rama.

"Rama! Rama!" he whispered.

"Hush!" she said softly, "listen to the words of the Ring Song!"

There was the same strange, sweet melody; but now in the midst of it there was a voice, small, yet divinely sweet:

"Red of the rose-heart, breath of the lily,
Fragrance of flowers that bloom by the way-side,
Whispers of leaves in the peace of the night time,
All are love, love, love.

"The babble of brooks, the rushing of rivers,
The roar and the hiss of the waves on the headlands,
The whistling, the wailing, the shriek of the storm wind,
All are love, love, love.

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"The silver of moonbeams, the silver of star-beams,
The gold of the sunrise, the gold of the sunset,
The throb of the bird's song in the cool of the morning,
All are love, love, love."

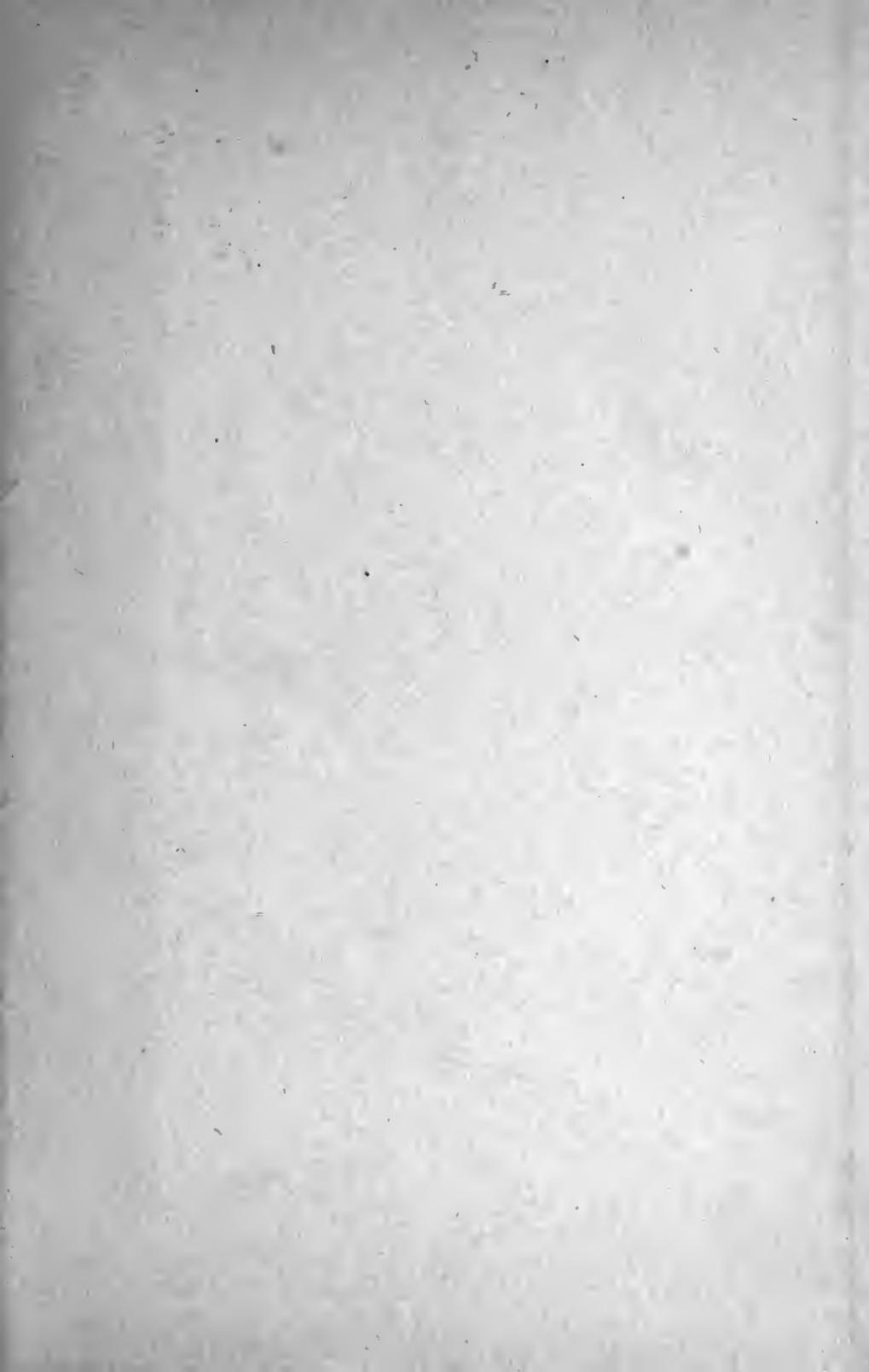




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